



Michigan Department of Education Special Populations Conference

Changing the Discussion about Difference, Equity and Achievement: A Personal Story



Presented by the
Seena M. Skelton, Ph.D.
Great Lakes Equity Center
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What is our dominant narrative
about difference?

Segregation
Fear
Good Ignore Bad
Focus

My story begins here in 1975



**Detroit, Michigan
Oakman Elementary
School for Physically or Otherwise Health Impaired Students**



HISTORICAL/POLITICAL

- 1975 PL 94-142
- 1974 Milliken v. Bradley clarified between *de jure* and *de facto* segregation
- Housing Redlining
- 1954, Brown v. Board of Education; 1955, Brown II, all deliberate speed



SOCIO-CULTURAL

- Racial/ethnic segregation
- Economic impact in urban centers
- “Super-crips” or “Helpless victim” media images of people with disabilities

Shaping Factors

What was the research telling us then?

Students with disabilities achieve at significantly lower levels than their non-disabled peers and held to lower expectations

African American students are referred to special education at higher rates than their share of the overall population.

Young people with disabilities are less likely to leave high school with a standard diploma and drop out of high school at twice the rate of their peers .

Young people with disabilities are less likely to go on to postsecondary education than non-disabled students, and those who start college are less likely to finish.

Low employment rates. Young people with disabilities have less secure futures.

Regular classroom teachers do not feel well prepared to address the special needs of students with disabilities.

African American and Latino students achieve at lower levels than their White counterparts.

So what did this mean for me?

A young black girl, growing up in the inner city of Detroit, with a disability attending public school.



1975 started
school

I learned being
different meant
being “special”

High School,
“Modulated
dreams?”

7th Grade,
mainstreamed
with the
“regular kids”

College
“I’m different
just like
everybody
else”

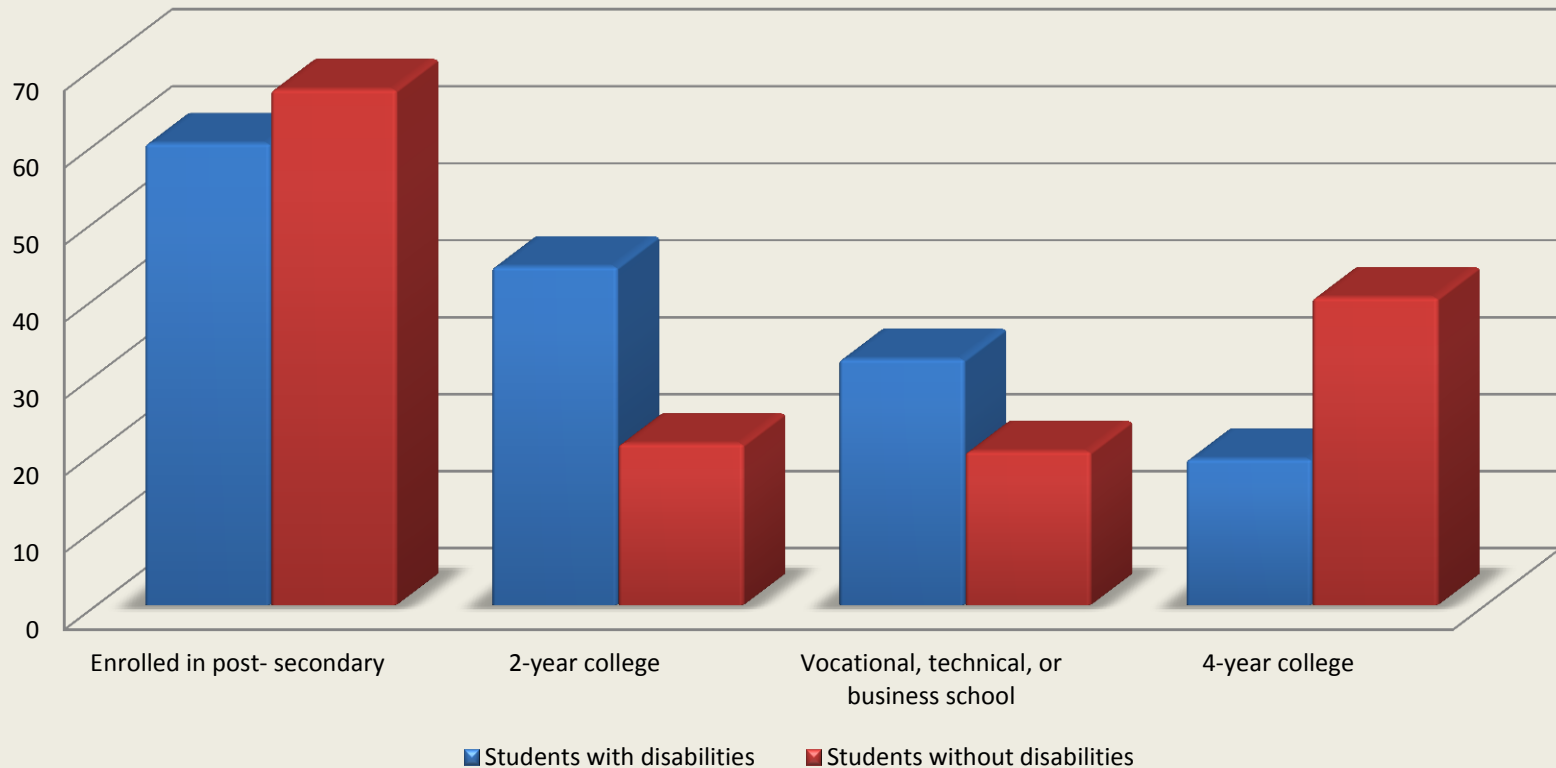


Where are we now and where
do we go from here?

**CHANGING THE NARRATIVE
ABOUT DIFFERENCE, EQUITY AND
ACHIEVEMENT**

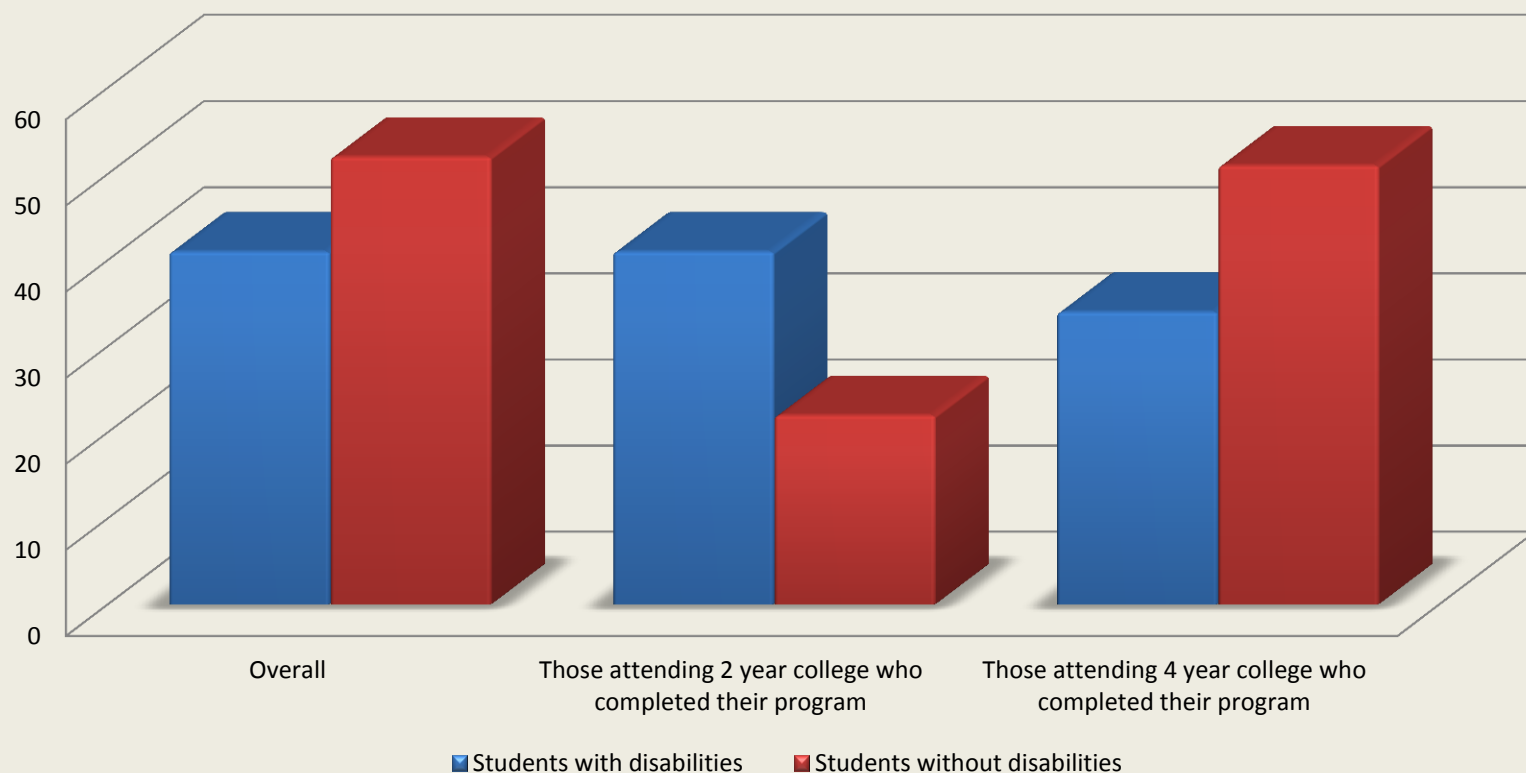
National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 2011

Percentage of Students in Postsecondary Education



Source: Newman, L., Wagner, M., Knokey, A.-M., Marder, C., Nagle, K., Shaver, D., Wei, X., with Cameto, R., Contreras, E., Ferguson, K., Greene, S., and Schwarting, M. (2011). The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults With Disabilities up to 8 Years After High School. A Report From the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) (NCER 2011-3005). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Percentage of Students Completing Postsecondary Education



Source: Newman, L., Wagner, M., Knokey, A.-M., Marder, C., Nagle, K., Shaver, D., Wei, X., with Cameto, R., Contreras, E., Ferguson, K., Greene, S., and Swarting, M. (2011). The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults With Disabilities up to 8 Years After High School. A Report From the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) (NCSE 2011-3005). Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Transformative change towards educational equity is **systemic** change that **disrupts** and **dismantles** historical legacies of normative **assumptions, beliefs, and practices** about individual characteristics and cultural identities **that marginalize** and disenfranchise people and groups of people.

Changing the Narrative Requires

Reframe deficit thinking

- *Develop an appreciative stance to difference*

Dislodge deficit discourse

- *Use the language of possibility*

Revise stratifying discourse

- *Create opportunities to learn*

Collaborating across professions

Partnering with communities and families

Expanding our solutions

Enacting systemic change at all levels

**Changing the Dominant Narrative about
Difference, Equity and Achievement**

Equity exists, in part, to the degree that all students feel they belong, are included, and are empowered.



Thank you for your participation!

[Website: www.greatlakesequitycenter.org](http://www.greatlakesequitycenter.org)

[Email: glec@iupui.edu](mailto:glec@iupui.edu)

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